

Forging Brand Commitment through Service Quality and Customer Experience: The Moderating Role of Customer Trust

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Abstract

*This study aims to analyze the influence of service quality and customer experience on brand commitment, with brand image as a mediating variable and customer trust as a moderating variable among car customers in Kendari City. Methods: This study employed an explanatory quantitative approach. **Methods:** This study employed an explanatory quantitative approach. A total of 200 car customers in Kendari City were selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling based on Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). **Results:** The findings indicate that service quality and customer experience have significant effects on brand image and brand commitment. Brand image was found to mediate the relationship between service quality, customer experience, and brand commitment. In addition, customer trust significantly strengthens the effect of brand image on brand commitment. These results show that better service quality and more positive customer experience contribute to stronger brand image and higher customer commitment to the brand. **Implications:** The results suggest that automotive companies need to improve service quality, create positive customer experiences, strengthen brand image, and build customer trust to sustain long-term customer relationships. This study is limited to car customers in Kendari City and uses a cross-sectional design. Therefore, future studies are recommended to expand the research area, apply a longitudinal design, and include other relevant variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding of brand commitment.*

INTRODUCTION

The competition of the automotive industry encourages companies to not only offer superior products, but also to build long-term relationships with customers through quality of service and valuable experience (Keiningham et al., 2020; Rizka & Vilantika, 2026; Roslan & Rahayuningsih, 2026). In an increasingly brand-dense market, car customers judge the company not only by the performance of the vehicle, but also by the quality of service interaction, ease of process, attention to customer needs, and impressions that arise from the entire consumption journey (Asraf et al., 2026; Pappas et al., 2023). In the midst of this competition, brand commitment is an important issue because it shows the willingness of customers to remain attached, loyal, and maintain a relationship with a brand in the long term.

The popularity of studies on service quality, customer experience, brand image, customer trust, and brand commitment is increasing because these five variables are interrelated in explaining modern customer behavior (Rather et al., 2021). A number of studies show that service quality and customer experience play a role in shaping customer evaluations of brands, which then develop into a positive brand image, trust, and stronger commitment. In the automotive industry, this relationship is becoming increasingly important because car purchase decisions are high-risk, high-value, and involve long-term considerations (Sharma et al., 2019). Therefore, understanding how service quality and customer experience can strengthen brand commitment through brand image

and customer trust is relevant for the development of research and managerial practices (Yingfei et al., 2022).

Service quality has an important role for organizations because it is the basis for forming customer evaluations of the company's ability to provide reliable, responsive, and expected services. The literature shows that good service quality can increase satisfaction, strengthen trust, and encourage customer loyalty and commitment to brands. For organizations, service quality is not just an operational activity, but a strategic instrument to retain customers and strengthen the brand's position in a competitive market (Fatma et al., 2016; Taoana et al., 2022). In the service industry and product-based industries with strong supporting services, service quality is the main signal that helps customers assess the company's credibility.

Customer experience is also an increasingly important variable because organizations today are required to create a fun, easy, and memorable experience at every point of customer interaction. A positive customer experience can strengthen emotional associations, improve quality perception, and form a better brand image. At the same time, brand image serves as a representation of customer perception of the brand, while customer trust reinforces customer confidence that the brand is reliable. The combination of all these variables is very important for organizations because it determines the strength of long-term relationships with customers and influences the formation of brand commitment as a high-value relational asset (Huyen, 2020; Kamath et al., 2020; Šerić & Mikulić, 2020).

Previous research has discussed the influence of service quality on brand commitment and the influence of customer experience on brand image and customer loyalty. Some studies have found that service quality has a direct effect on loyalty or commitment (Mahatama & Wardana, 2021), while other studies show that the influence is stronger through mediation such as satisfaction, trust, or brand experience (Durmaz, 2022). Similar things also occur in customer experience, which in some studies has been shown to strengthen brand image and commitment, but in other studies the influence is more dominant through indirect channels. These differences in results show that there is still an empirical gap related to the consistency of the relationship between variables, especially in a model that combines service quality, customer experience, brand image, customer trust, and brand commitment (Fonanda et al., 2025; Nisa et al., 2025).

Most studies tend to place these variables separately or only test the direct relationship between the main variables. There is still limited research that integrates brand image as a mediator as well as customer trust as a moderator in a framework of a relationship towards brand commitment (Kaur & Soch, 2013; Nyadzayo & Khajehzadeh, 2016). In fact, the theory of customer relations and brand equity explains that commitment formation does not only depend on functional evaluation, but also involves symbolic perceptions of the brand and the level of trust customers have in the brand (Ooi et al., 2022; Šerić & Mikulić, 2020). Common solutions that have been extensively researched usually emphasize improving service quality, creating a positive customer experience, and strengthening brand image (Singh et al., 2023). However, there have not been many studies that explain how the mechanism of influence becomes stronger or weaker depending on customer trust.

This research model offers a more complete mechanism to explain the formation of brand commitment. Service quality is positioned as a factor that shapes customer perception of the company's professionalism, reliability, and consistency (Budhiraja & Mittal, 2025). Customer experience is positioned as a factor that builds an emotional impression and a thorough evaluation of customers of their interactions with brands. Both variables are expected to strengthen brand image, which is how customers perceive and rate brands based on the real experiences they receive. A positive brand image will further increase brand commitment because customers feel that the brand is worthy of trust, pride, and maintained in a long-term relationship (Durmaz, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2022).

In addition, customer trust is placed as a moderator variable in the relationship between brand image and brand commitment. This means that the influence of brand image on brand

commitment is not always the same for every customer, but will be stronger for customers who have a high level of trust in the brand. This mechanism is important to explain why a good brand image doesn't always automatically lead to strong commitment. In many cases, a new brand image is really able to drive commitment if customers are confident that the brand is honest, reliable, and consistent in fulfilling its service promises (Dam & Dam, 2021; Syed Alwi et al., 2016). Thus, the core concept in this study solves the gap by presenting direct pathways, mediation pathways, and moderation effects in one integrated model.

This research was conducted on car customers in Kendari City. The automotive industry in this region shows the growing need for private vehicles as a means of mobility and supporting people's economic activities. In situations like this, it is not enough for automotive companies to rely solely on product specifications, but also need to build a strong brand impression through excellent service and a satisfactory customer experience (Supriaddin & Roslan, 2025). Car customers tend to have high expectations for service before purchase, during transactions, and after-sales service, so the relationship between service quality, customer experience, brand image, customer trust, and brand commitment becomes relevant to be tested (Moonti et al., 2023; Roslan, 2025; Yusuf & Roslan, 2024).

The selection of car customers in Kendari City is also important because the characteristics of the regional market can show different patterns of customer behavior compared to metropolitan cities. A customer's assessment of a car brand can be influenced by direct experience with the dealer, the quality of staff communication, the ease of obtaining service, and trust in the company (Yusuf & Roslan, 2025). Therefore, this study is expected to be able to provide an empirical picture of how brand commitment is formed in automotive customers in the region through a combination of service quality, customer experience, brand image, and customer trust (Nasrul et al., 2023).

This study aims to analyze the influence of service quality on brand commitment, the influence of service quality on brand image, the influence of customer experience on brand image, the influence of customer experience on brand commitment, and the influence of brand image on brand commitment. This study also aims to examine the role of brand image as a mediator in the relationship between service quality and customer experience to brand commitment, as well as to test customer trust as a moderator in the relationship between brand image and brand commitment. The contribution of this research is expected to appear on two sides. From the theoretical side, this research enriches the development of customer behavior models by integrating service quality, customer experience, brand image, customer trust, and brand commitment in one comprehensive framework. From a practical perspective, the results of this study can be the basis for automotive companies to design strategies to improve service quality, improve customer experience, strengthen brand image, and build customer trust so that their commitment to the brand is stronger and more sustainable.

METHODS

This study uses an explanatory quantitative approach that aims to examine the causal relationship between variables in the research model, namely service quality and customer experience as independent variables, brand image as a mediating variable, brand commitment as a dependent variable, and customer trust as a moderation variable. The study was conducted on 200 car customers in Kendari City who were selected using the purposive sampling technique, namely respondents who had experience in using services and interacting with certain car brands. Data collection was carried out through surveys using structured questionnaires distributed to respondents to obtain data on customer perception of service quality, customer experience, brand image, brand commitment, and customer trust.

The measurement of service Quality variables has 3 items adopted from Al-Gasawneh et al. (2022) for Customer Experience 3 items are taken from Pires et al. (2025), Brand Image is also the same 3 items from and Customer Trust 4 items from Barlas et al. (2023) and Brand

Commitment 3 items from Dam (2020). Each statement item is measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree, so that respondents' perceptions can be measured quantitatively and objectively. The research instrument was prepared by adapting indicators from relevant previous research, then adjusted to the context of the automotive industry and the characteristics of car customers in Kendari City.

The data was analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) based on Partial Least Squares (PLS) because this method is able to test complex research models simultaneously, both to see the direct influence, indirect influence through mediation, and the influence of moderation. The analysis process is carried out through two main stages, namely the evaluation of the outer model to assess the validity and reliability of the construct through the tests of convergent validity, discriminant validity, and composite reliability, and the evaluation of the inner model to test the path coefficient, R² value, and significance of the relationship between variables according to the research hypothesis. In this study, the analysis is focused on testing the influence of service quality on brand image and brand commitment, the influence of customer experience on brand image and brand commitment, the influence of brand image on brand commitment, the role of brand image mediation in the relationship between service quality and customer experience on brand commitment, and the role of customer trust moderation in strengthening the relationship between brand image and brand commitment. Hypothesis testing was carried out using the bootstrapping technique to determine the level of significance of each influence in the research model.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Based on gender, out of a total of 200 respondents for car customers in Kendari City, respondents were dominated by men by 61.50 percent, while women by 38.50 percent. In terms of age, the majority of respondents were in the range of 31-40 years, which was 48.00 percent, followed by 41-50 years old at 27.50 percent, 21-30 years old at 19.00 percent, and only a small number of respondents were over 50 years old, which was 5.50 percent. This shows that car users in Kendari City are dominated by the productive age group who have high mobility and large transportation needs. Judging from the level of education, most of the respondents have a Bachelor's (S1) education of 68.00 percent, followed by Diploma (D3) of 17.50 percent, Master's (S2) of 10.00 percent, and the rest of high school/equivalent education of 4.50 percent. Based on occupation, respondents were dominated by private employees by 35.00 percent, followed by entrepreneurs by 28.50 percent, civil servants (PNS) by 21.00 percent, and others by 15.50 percent. In addition, in terms of car use experience, the majority of respondents have used a car for more than 5 years at 46.00 percent, followed by 3-5 years at 32.00 percent, and less than 3 years at 22.00 percent. This indicates that most respondents have sufficient experience in assessing service quality, customer experience, and shaping perceptions of brand image and commitment.

Table 1. Measurement Model

Variables	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
Customer Trust	M_1	0,994	0,990	0,991	0,970
	M_2	0,990			
	M_3	0,969			
	M_4	0,987			
Service Quality	X1_1	0,937	0,927	0,928	0,872
	X1_2	0,941			
	X1_3	0,923			
Customer Experience	X2_1	0,944	0,940	0,940	0,893
	X2_2	0,945			

	X2_3	0,946			
Brand Image	Y1_1	0,785			
	Y1_2	0,891	0,816	0,815	0,733
	Y1_3	0,888			
Brand Commitment	Y2_1	0,914			
	Y2_2	0,920	0,904	0,906	0,838
	Y2_3	0,913			

Based on Table 1 of the Measurement Model, all indicators in each variable show a high load factor value, so that it can be declared to meet the criteria for convergent validity. In the Customer Trust variable, the loading value is in the range of 0.969–0.994; Service Quality of 0.923–0.941; Customer Experience of 0.944–0.946; Brand Image of 0.785–0.891; and Brand Commitment of 0.913–0.920. All of these loading values are above the minimum limit of 0.70, which means that each indicator is able to reflect a well-measured construct. In addition, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value for all variables is also above 0.50, namely Customer Trust 0.970, Service Quality 0.872, Customer Experience 0.893, Brand Image 0.733, and Brand Commitment 0.838. These results show that each construct has a good degree of convergent validity because it is able to adequately explain the variance of its indicators. In terms of reliability, the entire construct also shows an excellent level of internal consistency. This can be seen from Cronbach's Alpha values ranging from 0.816 to 0.990 and Composite Reliability values ranging from 0.815 to 0.991. The Customer Trust variable has Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.990 and Composite Reliability of 0.991, Service Quality of 0.927 and 0.928, Customer Experience of 0.940 and 0.940, Brand Image of 0.816 and 0.815, and Brand Commitment of 0.904 and 0.906. All of these values have exceeded the required threshold, which is 0.70, so it can be concluded that this research instrument is reliable and suitable for further analysis. Thus, the measurement model in this study has met the criteria of validity and reliability, so that it can be continued in the testing of structural models (inner models).

Table 2. Discriminant validity of constructs

	1	2	3	4	5
Brand _Commitment					
Fire _Image	0,782				
Customer Trust	0,799	0,683			
Customer _Experience	0,594	0,612	0,513		
Service _Quality	0,531	0,510	0,445	0,376	

Based on Table 2 Discriminant Validity of Constructs, the results of the discriminant validity test show that each construct in the research model has a good level of discrimination. This can be seen from the correlation value between constructs which is still below the root value of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of each variable. For example, the correlation between Brand Image and Brand Commitment is 0.782, while the correlation between Customer Trust and Brand Commitment is 0.799, and between Customer Experience and Brand Image is 0.612. These values show that each construct has a fairly strong relationship, but it can still be empirically distinguished from each other. In addition, the correlation between other variables such as Service Quality with Brand Commitment of 0.531, Service Quality with Brand Image of 0.510, and Customer Experience with Customer Trust of 0.513, also showed a relatively moderate value. This indicates that even though there is a relationship between constructs, each variable still has unique characteristics and there is no serious multicollinearity problem. Thus, it can be concluded that this research model has met the criteria of discriminant validity, so that each construct used is able to explain different concepts clearly and is suitable for use in further analysis of the structural model.

Table 3. R Square and Q2

	R-square	Q ² predict
Brand _Commitment	0,684	0,609
Fire _Image	0,363	0,347

Based on Table 3 R-Square and Q² Predict, the R-square value indicates the ability of independent variables to explain dependent variables in the research model. The Brand Commitment variable has an R-square value of 0.684, which means that 68.4% of the variation in brand commitment can be explained by service quality, customer experience, and brand image, while the remaining 31.6% is influenced by other variables outside the research model. Meanwhile, the Brand Image variable has an R-square value of 0.363, which indicates that 36.3% of brand image variations can be explained by service quality and customer experience, while the remaining 63.7% are influenced by other factors not included in the model. In addition, the Q² predict value is used to assess the predictive relevance of the model. The Brand Commitment variable has a Q² value of 0.609 and a Brand Image of 0.347, both of which are greater than zero. This shows that the model has good predictive ability of observational data. Overall, these results indicate that the structural model constructed in this study has a strong explanatory power for brand commitment and moderately enough for brand image, and has sufficient predictive relevance, making it feasible for use in further hypothesis testing.

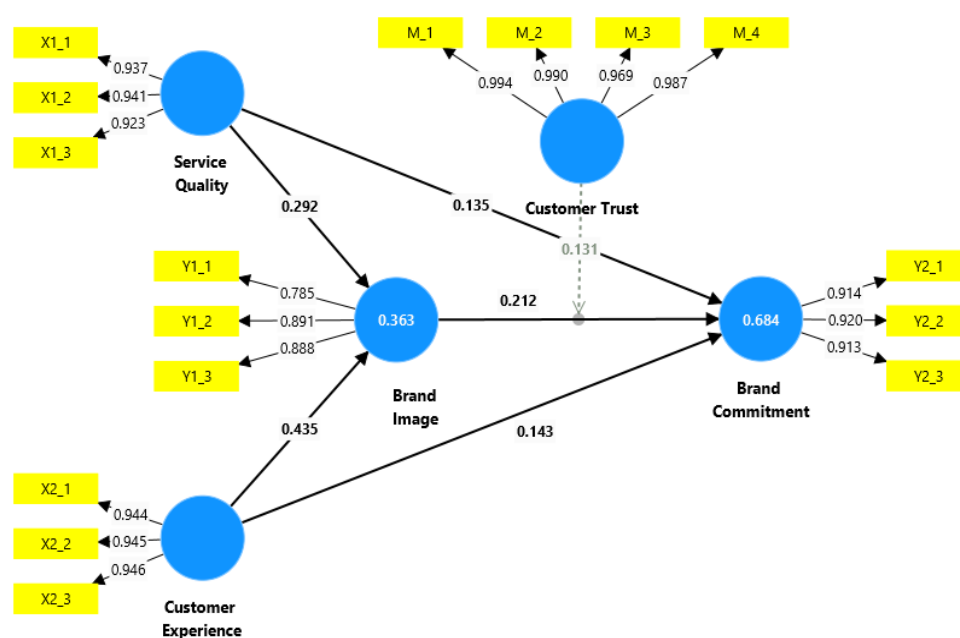


Fig. SmartPLS Structural equation model

Table 4. Results of Hypothesis Test

	Original sample	P values
Brand _Image -> Brand _Commitment	0,212	0,000
Customer Trust -> Brand _Commitment	0,506	0,000
Customer _Experience -> Brand _Commitment	0,143	0,000
Customer _Experience -> Brand _Image	0,435	0,000
Service _Quality -> Brand _Commitment	0,135	0,000
Service _Quality -> Brand _Image	0,292	0,000
Customer Trust x Brand _Image -> Brand _Commitment	0,131	0,007
Customer _Experience -> Brand _Image -> Brand _Commitment	0,092	0,002

Service_Quality -> Brand_Image -> Brand_Commitment	0,062	0,011
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Based on Table 4 Results of Hypothesis Test, the test results show that Brand Image has a positive and significant effect on Brand Commitment with an original sample value of 0.212 and a p-value of 0.000. These results show that the better the brand image that customers feel, the higher the customer commitment to the car brand. A positive brand image reflects the customer's perception that the brand has a reputation, quality, and excellence that is able to meet their expectations. Thus, the hypothesis that states that Brand Image affects Brand Commitment is accepted. Furthermore, Customer Trust has been proven to have a positive and significant effect on Brand Commitment with an original sample value of 0.506 and a p-value of 0.000. This coefficient value is the largest compared to other direct relationships, showing that customer trust has a very strong role in building commitment to the brand. This means that the higher the level of trust customers have in the car brand, the more likely they are to remain loyal, maintain the relationship, and continue to use the brand in the long term. Therefore, the hypothesis regarding the influence of Customer Trust on Brand Commitment can be declared acceptable.

The test results also showed that Customer Experience had a positive and significant effect on Brand Commitment with an original sample value of 0.143 and a p-value of 0.000. This means that a good customer experience while interacting with brands, both in the process of purchase, use, and after-sales service, can increase customer commitment to the brand. In addition, Customer Experience also has a positive and significant effect on Brand Image with an original sample value of 0.435 and a p-value of 0.000. These findings indicate that positive customer experiences can strengthen their perception of brand image. Thus, the hypothesis that states that Customer Experience affects Brand Commitment and Brand Image is accepted. In the Service Quality variable, the analysis results show that Service Quality has a positive and significant effect on Brand Commitment with an original sample value of 0.135 and a p-value of 0.000. This shows that the quality of service provided to customers, such as speed, accuracy, friendliness, and ability to meet customer needs, can increase customer commitment to the car brand. In addition, Service Quality also has a positive and significant effect on Brand Image with an original sample value of 0.292 and a p-value of 0.000. This means that the better the quality of service received by customers, the better the brand image that is formed in the minds of customers. Therefore, the two hypotheses related to the influence of Service Quality on Brand Commitment and Brand Image were accepted.

The moderation effect test showed that the interaction of Customer Trust x Brand Image with Brand Commitment had an original sample value of 0.131 with a p-value of 0.007. This result proves that Customer Trust is able to moderate the relationship between Brand Image and Brand Commitment positively and significantly. This means that the influence of brand image on brand commitment will be stronger if customers have a high level of trust in the brand. In this context, a good brand image not only directly increases customer commitment, but the influence will be greater when it is accompanied by customer trust in the reliability and integrity of the brand. Thus, the Customer Trust moderation hypothesis on the relationship between Brand Image and Brand Commitment is accepted. In the mediation effect test, the results were obtained that Customer Experience had an effect on Brand Commitment through Brand Image with an original sample value of 0.092 and a p-value of 0.002, and Service Quality had an effect on Brand Commitment through Brand Image with an original sample value of 0.062 and a p-value of 0.011. Both results show that Brand Image is able to significantly mediate the relationship between Customer Experience and Service Quality to Brand Commitment. This means that a good customer experience and high quality of service not only have a direct impact on brand commitment, but also indirectly through the formation of a positive brand image. Thus, the hypothesis regarding the mediating role of Brand Image in both relationships is accepted, so it

can be concluded that this research model as a whole has strong empirical support.

DISCUSSION

The discussion of the results of the study shows that brand image has an important role in shaping the brand commitment of car customers. These findings confirm that when customers have a positive perception of a brand, they tend to show a stronger attachment and desire to maintain a relationship with the brand in the long term. In the context of the automotive industry, brand image is not only related to product reputation, but also reflects the quality of interactions, prestige symbols, and customer confidence in the value that the brand offers. These results are in line with the view that brand image is a representation of customer perception that can strengthen emotional relationships and commitment to the brand (Cham et al., 2016; Huyen, 2020).

The results of the study also show that customer trust is a very important element in strengthening brand commitment. In a car purchase decision that is high-value and involves long-term risk, customers need confidence that the brand they choose is reliable, honest, and consistent in delivering on its service promises (Tali et al., 2021). This trust becomes the relational foundation that encourages customers to stick with the same brand. These findings support the view that customer commitment is not only built by rational judgments of products or services, but also by the belief that brands are able to provide a sense of security and trustworthiness in a sustainable manner (Ahmed & Jan, 2015; Monfort et al., 2025).

In addition, customer experience has been proven to contribute to shaping brand image while strengthening brand commitment. A positive customer experience at every point of interaction, from information searches, dealer visits, transaction processes, to after-sales service, can form a better overall impression of the brand. In the automotive industry, a pleasant and memorable experience will strengthen the emotional association of customers, so that the brand is not only seen as a vehicle provider, but also as a partner that adds value to customers (Hashem et al., 2024; Situmorang et al., 2025). These results are consistent with studies that state that customer experience is an important element in building brand perception and strengthening long-term relationships with customers (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2021; Durmaz, 2022).

On the other hand, service quality has also proven to be a relevant factor in improving brand image and brand commitment. The quality of service perceived through reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and physical evidence will shape the customer's evaluation of the company's professionalism. In the automotive market, the quality of service does not stop at the time of purchase, but it is also seen in the company's ability to handle complaints, provide clear information, and provide satisfactory after-sales service (Roslan, 2025). When customers rate the company's services as quality, they tend to view the brand more positively and ultimately develop a stronger commitment. These findings are in line with the opinion that service quality is a strategic instrument that can strengthen brand position and maintain long-term relationships with customers (Dam & Dam, 2021).

Further discussion shows that brand image acts as a bridge that explains how service quality and customer experience can develop into brand commitment. This means that good quality of service and customer experience do not always automatically result in commitment, but rather first form a positive perception of the brand. When customers judge that the brand has a good image, can be proud of, and lives up to their expectations, then the tendency to stay attached to the brand becomes even stronger. These findings show the importance of brand image as a psychological mechanism that connects the real experience of customers with their long-term relational decisions towards the brand (Giovanis, 2016; Nguyen et al., 2022). Furthermore, the results of this study also show that customer trust strengthens the relationship between brand image and brand commitment. This shows that a good brand image will be more effective in driving commitment if customers also have a high level of trust in the brand. In other words, a positive brand image is not necessarily enough to produce a strong commitment if it is not accompanied by trust. In the context of car customers in Kendari City, this condition shows that

automotive companies need to build a good brand image while maintaining service consistency so that customers feel confident in the integrity and credibility of the brand. These findings support the theory of customer relations and brand equity which emphasizes that commitment is born from a combination of positive symbolic perception and customer confidence in brand reliability (Šerić & Mikulić, 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that service quality and customer experience have an important role in shaping the brand image and brand commitment of car customers in Kendari City. Brand image has proven to be a key mechanism that bridges the influence of service quality and customer experience on brand commitment, thus showing that a positive perception of the brand is the foundation in building long-term relationships with customers. In addition, customer trust has been proven to strengthen the relationship between brand image and brand commitment, which confirms that customer trust is a crucial element in increasing the effectiveness of brand image in creating commitments. The practical implication of these findings is that automotive companies need to simultaneously improve service quality, design a consistent and memorable customer experience, and build trust through transparency, reliability, and customer-oriented service in order to sustainably strengthen brand commitments. This research has several limitations, including limitations in the coverage of the area which is only carried out in Kendari City so that the generalization of the research results is still limited to the local context, as well as the use of a cross-sectional approach that has not been able to capture the dynamics of changing customer perceptions over time. Therefore, further research is recommended to expand the research area, use a longitudinal approach, and develop models by adding other variables or comparing between brands/customer segments in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the formation of brand commitment in the automotive industry.

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